A Study of Appadurai's idea of Cultural Homogenization in Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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ABSTRACT: *This study examines the concept of Cultural Homogenization as one of the root causes of globalization in the Indian society. The study narrows down by applying a major global scape, Ethnoscape proposed by Arjun Appadurai to explore contemporary globalized Indian culture in The White Tiger by Arvind Adiga. The novel portrays that the globalization in the Indian society propagates the idea of Americanization. Therefore, globalization here is taken in a negative connotation as the research also sheds lights that the arrival of the global culture in postcolonial Indian society is basically propagation of American Imperialism. This imposition of American imperialist culture and selective globalization intensifies the class stratification that eventually catalyzes the internal migrations. The study claims that this huge influx of people and information through technological resources causes loss of individualism and native identity when cultural globalization encourages a 'western ideal'. Therefore, with a foremost exploration to analyze the influence globalization has upon culture, this study aims to back up the uniqueness of national cultures amid homogenized world culture.*

Keywords: Cultural Homogenization, Americanization, Ethnoscape, Cultural Imperialism, Selective globalization.

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Introduction

This study deals with the Cultural Homogenization and its sociocultural impacts, particularly in the Indian society with reference to Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. Cultural Homogenization is the diffusion of local culture into the global culture, leading to the death of cultural diversity. Domination of the global culture follows the extinction of indigenous culture and cultural distinctiveness. This Homogenization is synonymous with the Americanization of Indian society. Jones Micheal Jaja stresses this idea claiming that world is currently undergoing Americanization which is basically the "global spread of America's influential dominance and culture through growth of mass communication and penetration of American companies in other countries" (Jaja 113). This homogenization of American culture is a destructive force "a recipe for cultural disaster" (122). This paper takes on Arjun Appadurai's concept of cultural homogenization that ensures the global flow for the theoretical analysis of the text.

Arjun Appadurai, a leading cultural theorist of globalization studies, looks at the cultural changes of this shrinking world in his book *Modernity at Large*. The book talks about the challenges that Indian society face in a contemporary world. He claims that the interrelated forces of modern mass media and mass migration affect the notions of the self or nationhood. According to him, "electronic mediation and mass migration, the driving forces of globalization have the dramatic joint effect on the work of imagination" (114). The modern world is under the spell of these regulated images that influence the understanding of the self or nation-state collectively. Thus, as the imaginations or ideas travel through the mass media the people migrate towards the capital to follow their lucrative desires moreover; new communication technologies also enable the virtual migrations. According to him, Cultural homogenization occurs when a local culture tends to conform to or imitate the global culture "as forces from metropolises are brought into new societies, they tend to become indigenized" (Appadurai 22). It is referred as cultural imperialism as this globalization originates from Western cultures (9) that erode local cultures spreading American ways of living to the world. Appadurai admits that Cultural homogenization is an "argument about Americanization or commoditization in postcolonial states like India" (Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* 32) as "for the politics of smaller scale, there is always a fear of cultural absorption by politics of larger scale" (Appadurai 5).

Appadurai proposes five global scapes of culture flows namely ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes that are the building blocks of the modern world (Modernity at Large 67). These global scapes operate simultaneously in the novel which makes India an epicenter of globalization. The increase of cultural exchange through these scapes it becomes essential to maintain the local culture along with the involvement of global culture. Appadurai talks about this tension between the homogenization and heterogenization that leads to the formation of a homogenous society. He summarizes this struggle saying, "the central feature of global culture is the politics of the mutual effort of sameness and difference to cannibalize one another" (Appadurai, Modernity at Large 334). This paper deeply studies the Ethnoscapes among the five others, operate in the Indian society making it an epicenter of globalization. He states that ethnoscape comprises of the people of a nation who "have the fantasy to move out of their home nation to another" (588). They include refugees, immigrants, tourists and other moving groups. The ethnoscape or "landscapes of group identity" are non-localized due to a number of migrations across the nation. Thus, study explores that in this epoch of globalization the escalating electronic media, technological advancements and mass migration trends provide new ways to look at the consumerist behavioral patterns and multiculturalism following the ethnic tensions.

Arvind Adiga is the fourth Indian author to win the Man Booker Prize in 2008 for his debut novel The White Tiger. During his freelance journalism, he penned down every social, economic or psychological change taking place in Indian society in the name of globalism. The novel The White Tiger revolves around the journey of Balram Halwai from a rickshaw puller and coal crusher to an entrepreneur. In this epistolary novel Balram writes for consecutive seven nights to the Chinese premier to enlighten him about the evil and brutal side of New India through his own narrative. While writing Balram retrospect the adventures of his life that depicts the dichotomy within India that is the "India of light and India of Darkness" (Adiga 9). The village, Laxmangarh, where he was born was the flip side of the modern lives in Delhi and Bangalore. Balram learns the mantra of living life in the globalizing world and started working as a chauffeur to his master's son Ashok. He became morally corrupt and plans to get rid of his master. Finally, on the ripe time he slits his master's throat and boards train to Bangalore with a big bag of money. In the last night he tells that his journey from darkness to light started by murdering his employer and donning on his name, Mr. Ashok. He

becomes a successful entrepreneur of Bangalore and owner of the taxi company named as "White Tiger Drivers" (Adiga 151).

Sarah Brouillette in the voluminous book *Re-Orientalism and South Asian Identity Politics* explains that Adiga asks his readers to situate the novel "in opposition to business books for aspiring elites which boast of celebratory treatments of the globalization and a critique on new India" (Brouillette 42). Therefore, the paper aims to relocate India in its true cultural, political and economic context. The research study analyses the assimilation of global culture in Indian society with the implication of the concept of Cultural Homogenization. This study refers homogenized culture as a conspiracy by the world superpower USA to rule people. Ania Loomba in the book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, states that unlike colonization which only aimed at raw materials, goods and labor; "cultural homogenization exploits the psychological and domestic array of third world population" (Loomba 256-57). Globalization is an empowering entity but for the third world countries it's a "meaner edition of postcolonialism" (Loomba 231). Moreover, it provides scathing critique of westernization which caused loss of Indianness in the contemporary Indian society.

Research Questions

1. How does the cultural homogenization lead to the assimilation of Western capitalist culture into third world countries like India?
2. How does the concept of cultural imperialism support class stratification, leading to massive migrations in the globalized India?

The analysis of previous research studies that are already been done on the novel will help to avoid the unnecessary repetition and identify the research gap. Bharatender Sheoran calls the novel as Balram's odyssey as he raises the social ladder by stealing money and murdering his master that shows the transformation from "autocracy to outcry" (173). In the study "Adiga's *The White Tiger*: A Political Feast" Sudhir K. Arora opposes Adiga's perception of India calling it as the "projection of India through Western gaze… a political feast for Western guests" (Arora 172). He claims that the novel serves its western readers with their most likeable dishes such as poverty, injustice, discrimination or unemployment. Furthermore, under the light of Gayatri Spivak's idea of subalterns, Balram is called as the voice of the voiceless as he experiences social mobility through the act of self-actualization (Maji 352). In the dissertation *De-Democratization and the Novels of Aravind Adiga,* Ryan

Brown argues that the novel "demonstrate the phenomenon of de-democratization occurring in contemporary liberal democracies" (Brown 7). The study questions the validity of the democratic system in India calling it a de-democratized state in which system of servitude is more prevalent than the democracy. In *Discourse of Entrepreneurship in The White Tiger*, Haitham Hind critically examines Adiga's stance on the entrepreneurial attitudes of Indians in the neoliberal era. He states Balram debunks the false image of the entrepreneurs who rises at the expense of someone's life in the global age as "commodities that can be traded, risked, destroyed in the name of business success or social mobility" (Hind 8). Acknowledging Jean Paul Sartre's idea of existentialism Nalini Saxena analyses that Balram's existential angst for seeking individuality and freedom of expression is observed as he murders his master to build his own personal self. Balram's existential journey is studied under the heading of "alienation, individualism, transcendence and search of identity" (146).

 In nutshell the earlier writers focused on the aspects of poverty, subalternism, poor/rich dichotomy, existential angst and the entrepreneurial ethos that are intrigued by the capitalist culture. Moreover, the globalization was established as a key idea in economics, but later due to the global flow of information, ideas or commodities it has also affected the culture deeply. Therefore, as there is no significant research being conducted on the novel regarding the phenomenon of cultural homogenization in this global world. This paper is an intellectual endeavor to not only consider globalization for its technological or economic development rather its impacts on the cultural sphere in a pessimistic light. The research aims to fill the theoretical gap using Appadurai's idea of cultural homogenization. The profound analysis of *The White Tiger* aids in authenticating the global reality of the modern India. It also analyzes the loss of individualism and national identity when cultural globalization encourages a western ideal. Moreover, the effects of globalization on culture and human identity will be examined meticulously applying the constituents of ethnoscapes such as migrations and intercultural exchanges that help prosper a multicultural society in global world.

Research Methodology

 The research is qualitative in nature as it employs detailed study of *The White Tiger* written by Arvind Adiga for investigating the issues raised in

the research questions. The research is conducted with the application of the theoretical framework of Arjun Appadurai's theory called Cultural Homogenization. As the novel provides primary data, the secondary data is extracted from other research studies, articles or books that are relevant to the research topic.

 Cultural homogenization has produced mainly one culture as it abolishes cultural diversity and brings everyone into the global culture. The study presumes that homogenization is nothing more than the imposition of American capitalist culture. It is essential to portray how individuals express their respective cultural identities meanwhile merge in the global culture. Theoretically, this idea didn't receive much attention in its early days, but this study will try to add on to the major concerns of academics so that they are able to preserve culture against the trend of cultural uniformity or homogeneity. Therefore, there is the need to bring forward all the dynamics of globalization that are leading to the death of nativity by encouraging global culture.

Discussion

The novel *The White Tiger* is remarked as the dark comic or satirical representation of modern India. Adiga delineates the alarming situation around him and provides the reader with the realistic narrative of the contemporary Indian society. Most of the critics call him "Dickens of Mumbai" (Riemer) believing that his realism might bring resonating changes in the society as the realism of Dickens or Balzac once had on the societies of France and England. Novel depicts the picture of cosmopolitan cities Delhi or Bangalore where the huge flux of media information or arrival of immigrants brings astonishing changes in socio-cultural patterns of ethnic identity. In an interview accessed from The Guardian, when Adiga was questioned about the practicality of the novel he states that "at this time of great change-India is inheriting the world from the west…the attempt of writing is to pinpoint the brutal injustices of society and a process of self-examination" (Adiga). Appadurai's concept of ethnoscape is taken as a focal point in this research study. Ethnoscape means "the landscape of people who constitute the shifting world in which we live" (Appadurai 297). These people in flux have an essential share in the intercultural exchanges among nation states. Moreover, they have political, economic or cultural effects to an unprecedented degree. In this global world, transnational corporations, money markets or political structures operate in ways to not only

transcend borders but also the identities of the characters in the novel. The following sections discuss different sorts of interactions characters make on the global platform and the impacts they have on one another. This chapter will discuss the emergence of ethnoscapes in the contemporary Indian society and its dimensions of ethnoscapes such as migrations, multiculturalism or propagation of technology that aids in the intercultural exchanges.

Migration

Migration is one of the key factors that cause the huge flux of people from one region to another. Appadurai states that the "the international flow of people constitutes an important feature of our modern world that has cultural, social and political effects" (Appadurai, *Modernity At Large* 305-06). Immigrants carry with themselves their respective cultures and thus in metropolitan cities they face challenges of assimilation. The assimilation threatens their self-identity that ultimately results in nurturing of a homogenized self that emerges in the global culture. Nederveen Pieterse argues that "migrants do interethnic mingling" (45). The imperial dominance can be witnessed in the displacement of masses from under-developed states to developed nations. Some people become hybridized and some resist the change as they are disillusioned when they experience inequality, slavery, ethnic discriminations and victimization.

 Aravind Adiga writes about three different landscapes of India. The story starts from the rustic setting of village Laxmangarh to the urban hub of India which is Delhi and finally ends in the silicon valley of India, Bangalore. Balram's internal migration from small village named Laxmangarh to the cosmopolitan city Bangalore gave him awareness about both sides of India. In the book *Introduction of Globalization*, Manfred B. Steger describes that "The existence of sprawling networks of economic and cultural exchange triggered massive waves of migration" (26). This intercultural exchange results in the rapid growth of urban centers. Migration intensifies cultural exchanges transforming traditional into western cultural patterns. This raising globalization results in the unequal distribution of resources among the urban and rural areas. Globalization encompasses the entire globe but depending upon the unequal distribution of resources its positive or negative effects vary in different regions. This is idea of "selective globalization" (13) by Jan Nederveen Pieterse which means that the origin of globalization was Europe, while the remote cultures are affected lately because the global

population does not have equal access to technologies and markets. Balram learned the discrepancies that persist despite the modern age prosperity. His village is the flipside of the giant societal and economic structures and corporate sectors. He states, India is divided in two as "an India of Light and an India of darkness" (Adiga 9). Village life is full of dark realities which stand in contrast to the urban life of Delhi and Bangalore which are glimmering with global advancements.

 Balram elucidates that Laxmangarh is sarcastically called as "Indian Village Paradise" (Adiga 11) in papers but in reality, the "electricity poles are defunct, water tap broken and children, too lean with over-sized heads" (Adiga 12). Therefore, a lot of internal migrations occur as the people from these undeveloped regions become desirous of the amenities that the global hubs like Delhi and Bangalore enjoy. Balram says that most people who can afford try to escape this terrific environment. The poor run away with a hope to get some financial stability and become the backbone for their family members. However, going for the indentured jobs they are blackmailed, humiliated and forced to work in inhuman conditions and when they return back "they are leaner, darker, angrier but with money in their pockets" (Adiga 15). The poor go to the India of light to chase their dreams but they face disillusionment because instead of seeking a new life they still end up in slums, serving their masters "The poor bastards had come from Darkness to Delhi to find some light — but they were still in the darkness" (Adiga 116). Balram says that the conditions are worse in the cities as "stench of faeces was replaced by the stronger stench of industrial sewage and the slum ended up in an open sewer" (Adiga 260).

Balram dubbed as "the white tiger- rarest among generations" (Adiga 21) had the guts to migrate to the city and learn driving. When Balram left for Delhi his brother, Kishan, eyes were full of tears of triumph that "someone in the family was going to make it out of the Darkness" (Adiga 63). Soon he becomes a chauffeur to Mr. Ashok the son of his landlord. As global markets expand the cities like Delhi becomes focal points for financial investments and Information technology. From the driving seat of the Honda city Balram sees Delhi, the pseudo America. The depiction of global cities through novel suggests that the blending of different cultures alter the "national identities as mélange identities" (Pooch 33) because migration boons the inter-cultural exchanges. Staying in Bangalore Balram notices that, "The city was full of outsiders no one would notice one more" (Adiga 168). Balram's immigrant identity is

provoked by the Americanized cultural patterns of host country. He loses his ethnicity and adopts the homogenized culture. Daniele Conversi's calls this as ethnocide, "cultural homogenization implies the intent to destroy a national/ethnic group" (720). When Balram visited the village, his anger and disgust towards his own place of birth is shown as he spat looking towards village "I did something too disgusting. I spat again and again. And then went back" (Adiga 31). Balram's physical journey from town of Gurgaon to the metropolitan states became life changing for him as he ultimately slits his master's throat at the expense of his own prosperity. The homogenization occurs as the worldviews or cultural norms from the west penetrate the under-developed countries like India. The intercultural exchange can also cause the manipulation of the beings that are being suppressed by the affluent visiting culture. This gives birth to consumer culture as the visiting people become aspiring entities. It is stated in The Empire Writes Back that, in a post-colonial state "A valid and active sense of self is eroded by dislocation resulting from migration" (Ashcroft Bill, Gareth Griffiths 9). In the novel, Ashok tries his best to recreate an American experience in India for his foreigner wife. The globalized society of Delhi shows an Americanized world constructed on the Indian land. Ashok says, "If Pinky missed America, this (Delhi) was the best place to bring her" (Adiga 121).

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism refers to the "legal and political coherence of ethnical diversity, coexistence of several cultures, modern societies covering different cultural groups, and ensuring that these different cultural groups have equal statutes" (Aydin 3). It refers to a set of cultural movements and trends that emphasize the diversity of U.S. culture and society (5). The mixing of people from different ethnic backgrounds brings together the themes of national distinctiveness, cultural diversity, peaceful co-existence of cultures or one dominating the other. In the global era coexistence of multiple cultures promotes the cultural hegemony that erodes the national identity of the weaker nation. Under the influence of dominant global culture, the native traditions, values or cultural patterns tends to become homogenized. Appadurai states that, "increased cultural exchange promotes the problem of balancing forces of homogenization" that results in the sameness or difference (*Modernity at Large* 334). As the dominating culture is the American culture, cultural homogenization is more like the Americanization of Indian society. Manfred in the book *Introduction of Globalization* states that, "the unrivaled global

superpower, America exports its culture on an unprecedented scale. From music to media, film to fast food, language to literature and sport, the American idea is spreading inevitably" (18). The critics of multiculturalism advocate the support for the minority cultures to give them some recognition.

The White Tiger explored the changing cultural and mental makeup of the Indian society as the world is shrinking into a global village. In the novel, the immigrant characters coming from different remote areas carry with them different cultural values. In the cosmopolitan cities like Delhi the population feels a pressure of following the global culture to survive in the developing age. Throughout the novel, the reader notices that America in some form is popping out from the cultural or social practices of Indians. Balram sees a remarkable difference in the Americanized societies of Delhi and Bangalore "Life in Bangalore is good—rich, food, beer, nightclubs" (Adiga 154). Balram decided to move to Dhanbad with the urge to get out of the rooster coop. Balram says that "There was money in the air in Dhanbad" (Adiga 37), the coal miners are making money out of the coal and are residing in the big cities as Mr. Ashok who is living Delhi, the Americanized Indian society. In a traffic jam on the ring road of Delhi, Balram realizes that people from different origins and social classes are in the rate race "drivers of auto rickshaws, a man driving buffalo cart, drivers of Honda city and White Ambassador cars" (Adiga 77). Different classes intermingle together and the homogenizing global culture overpowers them all.

Cultural dominance is the economic, technological or cultural hegemony of the west. Cultural imperialism of west results in the acculturation as John Tomlinson defines it as "the use of political and economic power to exalt and spread at the expense of a native culture" (Tomlinson 3). United States holds world's largest economic share, this inspires other nations to follow the American standards resulting in suppressing their indigenous cultures. Adiga debates that cultural dominance of western world is accelerated by the different means of globalization. Adiga explores that English language has strong roots in the newly emerging globalized states of India as it poses threat to the native language, its literature and their cultural heritage. Balram talks about the dominance of the English language which validates that how the overpowering global culture is causing death of native language "Neither you nor I speak English, but there are some things that can be said only in English" (Adiga 1). According to Frantz Fanon's idea that the identity of "The Negro of the

Antilles will be proportionally whiter that is, he will come closer to being a real human being with the direct ratio to his mastery of the French language" (36). Balram internalizes that his indigenous language is inferior and he have to learn the colonizers language which could serve better purposes. When he became rich like his master, he admitted his nephew Dharam in an English school which only the Indians of light can afford. "He goes to a good English school here in Bangalore. Now he pronounces English like a rich man's son. He can say "pizza" the way Mr. Ashok said it" (Adiga 188). Delhi is captivated with the English language that its housing schemes, description of roads or even the pet animals hold English names. Moreover, he says that a good English speaker is given more respect and importance. Such hypnotizing effects by the arrival of English language have relegated the essence of Indianness

The Americanism is also reflected from the altering of physical appearances for instance the concept of fair white skin like Americans is prompted in the novel. Balram says white skin means superiority; many companies have introduced the skin-whitening creams "I'm of half a mind to try one of those skin-whitener creams they've launched so Indian men can look white as westerners" (Adiga 12). Similarly, when Balram went to a brothel he encounters that the prostitutes of India have dyed their hair golden or blonde to look like the western girls "*This is not gold, the roots were black! It was all a dye job, a local product in foreign packaging!*" (Adiga 132) Balram's native identity also changed as he aspires to look Americanized like his master Mr. Ashok who recently came back from America. While shopping he looked for the shirts that Mr. Ashok would like for himself. He narrates that, "*I kept saying no to each shirt—until I found one that was all white, with a small word in English in the center*" (Adiga 152). He was looking for a T-shirt with some English alphabet design that would stand out among the local designs. Falling victim to the hegemonic ideologies and mimicking his Indian-American master will help him settle in the Imperialist society.

In *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*, Manfred suggests that, "we are not moving towards a cultural rainbow rather, we are witnessing the rise of an increasingly homogenized popular culture underwritten by a Western 'culture industry' based in New York, London and Milan" (70). The amalgamation of western ideas in the Indian society brought development but the disturbance caused in the traditional faiths, norms and thoughts cannot be neglected. The cosmopolitan Indian society pretends to be like west as they imitate dress codes, food and other social

events too. Pinky Madam is the resilient character who didn't conform to the norms and cultural values of India as "She wore pants; I gaped. Who had ever seen a woman dressed in trousers before—except in the movies? She was one of those magical things from New York" (Adiga 79). Bold dressing, freedom in marital relation, alcohol consumption and prostitution were quite disturbing for a typical Indian like Balram. He says that "with late night parties, clubs, drinking, and munching the rich tend to get fat in Delhi" (Adiga 125). Balram after becoming rich learns how to eat with a fork and knife and drink coffee like the foreigners do believing that he would look more presentable. "I was eager to try coffee. Before you could drink it, you had to know how to drink it. There was etiquette associated with it that fascinated me" (Adiga 168).

Commodification is another aspect that is spreading very fast. Among Indians the products with foreign brand tags are more preferable than any local brands. Shopping malls are the main hub of foreign brands that are doing marketing at their best and persuading the people to consume innumerable products "I saw shops with huge photos of handsome European men and women hanging on each wall" (Adiga 86). This flourishing consumer culture promotes the economy but also impacts the mentality of the people. People spend their times in malls or clubs drinking and doing illicit acts with the mascots. Mr. Ashok is convinced that India is soon going to stand out, "There are so many more things I could do here than in New York now –this place is going to be like America in ten years" (Adiga 77).

Conclusion

The research study discussed the impacts of cultural homogenization on the Indian society by implying Appadurai's theory of cultural homogenization. Appadurai proposed that the dominance of global culture over the host culture results in a homogenous society which is a threat for the existence of indigenous cultures. The sense of losing one's native culture and melding in the global culture is studies through the major character Balram Halwai. The novel starts from the backward region of India, Laxmangarh. Then Balram migrates to the Delhi that has become Americanized as the suburban markets and booming usage of foreign products brings forth the consumer culture. Unequal distribution of economy loses the equilibrium of society intensifying the social class stratification. Delhi becomes the center of multiculturalism where people

from different regional and cultural backgrounds interact with each other. Thus, the study describes the ethnoscapes as the internal migrations of characters, multiculturalism and the Americanization as the aspects that leads to the homogenization of culture. This trend of cultural uniformity stands in contrast with the idea of cultural diversity as the former promotes global culture suppressing the local cultures. Thus, as the cultural diversity is inexorable in a technological-cum-globalized environment it is essential to preserve the uniqueness of every culture empowering people to own their cultural values and native language and staying connected to their cultural roots.

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